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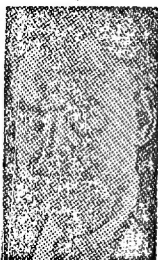
These Days

By John Chamberlain

CPYRGHT

Think Before Voting

EVERY CITIZEN ought to go to the polls. But before going, the voter ought to look carefully in the looking glass and ponder the state of his own ignorance. This might lead to less cocksureness about certain issues. A humble vote is apt to be sounder than a vote registered in arrogance.



These thoughts are prompted by an article by Richard Nixon on "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy" that is scheduled for appearance in the forthcoming November issue of The Reader's Digest. Nixon, as he has been reminding Republican audiences in his whirlwind campaign on behalf of the Goldwater candidacy, lost the 1960 election by the margin of a gnat's whisker. As he looks back on things in his article, he thinks he was beaten when John F. Kennedy plastered him with a "soft on Castro" charge just prior to the fourth and last TV debate between the candidates.

There was a tremendous irony in this, for Nixon was powerless to combat the absolutely baseless charge for reasons that had to do with the security of a top-secret CIA project for invading Cuba that had already been set in motion by the Eisenhower Administration.

NIXON ADMITS that the controlling elements inside the Eisenhower Government had goofed in their original estimate of Castro's character, although he himself had sent a memorandum to

Allen Dulles, boss of the Central Intelligence Agency, concluding that "Castro is either incredibly naive about communism or is under Communist discipline." Regardless of the original mistake, however, Eisenhower had decided by early 1960 that Castro was a Communist agent. Says Nixon, "In a top-secret meeting . . . at which I was present, Eisenhower authorized the CIA to organize and train Cuban exiles for the eventual purpose of freeing their homeland from Castro's Communist rule."

It was just six months later that John F. Kennedy leveled an attack on Nixon for being a member of a "soft-on-Castro" Administration. Said Kennedy, "We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista, democratic, anti-Castro forces in exile and in Cuba itself who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far, these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our Government."

The Kennedy charge left Nixon in a "heads-he-wins, tails-I-lose" situation. If, in the next TV debate, Nixon were to tell the American public about the existence of the program for preparing the Cuban exiles for an invasion of their homeland, pointing out that he was one of its strongest advocates inside the Administration, it "would pull the rug out from under Kennedy's position." "But," says Nixon, "if I did so, the project would be doomed, and also the lives of brave men, both inside and outside of Cuba, who were receiving training and assistance."

SO, FACING his own conscience, Nixon had to go on

the air with what could easily be twisted into a "soft-on-Castro" position. Kennedy proceeded to reap the advantage, which was probably crucial in view of the fact that "a shift of less than one-half a vote a precinct" would have made Nixon the winner a few days later.

Nixon's 1960 agony recalls that of Thomas Dewey in 1944, when the Republicans knew practically all the details about the surprise at Pearl Harbor yet were loath to put the issue into the campaign lest they reveal to the Japanese that the U.S. had broken a critical code.

This columnist vividly recalls riding in a car from Elmira to Geneva, N.Y., in August of 1945 with Dewey and listening to his rueful account of the decision to say nothing about Pearl Harbor. The worst of it, from Dewey's standpoint, is that he had a suspicion that the Japanese had changed their codes long before 1944, which would have made campaign revelations about Pearl Harbor harmless to the U.S. from a military standpoint.

WHEN I talked to Tom Dewey in 1945 he thought he might have been cheated out of a winning issue in 1944. And today we have Nixon asking, "Now the question was, did John Kennedy know of (the CIA) project?"

Well, what the voter doesn't know may be everything. Or it may be nothing. But the voter who realizes his possible ignorance will be a more careful man when he pulls that lever.

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